



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Office of the Secretary

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**INTERIOR SECRETARY LUJAN PRAISES SIGNING OF
NORTH AMERICAN WETLANDS CONSERVATION ACT**

Secretary of the Interior, Manuel Lujan, today praised the signing by President Bush of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act.

"This legislation provides a major boost to our efforts under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan to restore declining waterfowl populations and conserve wetlands," Secretary Lujan said. "President Bush stated his strong support for the North American Waterfowl Management Plan when he took office and has been looking forward to signing legislation that will help us meet the Plan's waterfowl habitat protection goals in the United States, Canada, and Mexico."

Lujan, who earlier this year recommended independently one of the new law's major provisions--creation of a trust fund to provide guaranteed funding for the Plan--said he will move expeditiously to appoint the members of the North American Wetlands Conservation Council established under the legislation. "As the lead Federal agency for the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the Department of the Interior is already proceeding to implement this law," Lujan said. "I will be working closely with Constance Harriman, the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks; and John Turner, the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; to carry out the legislation."

The law, introduced by Senators George J. Mitchell and John H. Chafee, and Congressmen Silvio Conte, Robert W. Davis, and John D. Dingell, provides a guaranteed source of funding for implementation of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and establishes procedures for expending those funds.

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The Plan is an international agreement signed by the United States and Canada in 1986. Its goal is to conserve and restore vital waterfowl habitats and rebuild continental waterfowl numbers. Because the Plan focuses on conserving wetland habitats, it has broad environmental benefits for many kinds of fish and wildlife, as well as water and soil conservation. The Plan is being carried out through cooperative "joint venture" partnerships among Federal, state, and local governments; private conservation groups; businesses; and individual citizens.

To fund the Plan, the law converts the 52-year-old Pittman-Robertson account for Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration into an interest-bearing trust fund. The fund, derived from excise taxes paid by sportsmen on hunting equipment, could provide an estimated \$10 million in interest annually, to be made available for the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. The law also authorizes additional appropriations, up to \$16 million annually, for the Plan.

The expenditure of the funds will be overseen by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, an existing Cabinet-level body that approves the expenditure of funds generated from sales of Federal Duck Stamps for acquisition of national wildlife refuge lands. Under the new law, the North American Wetlands Conservation Council will advise the Commission on expenditures for the North American Plan. The Secretary of the Interior will appoint members of the Council, which will include representatives from states and private conservation groups as well as the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Executive Director of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Between 50 and 70 percent of the available funds will be spent each year to enhance, restore, and acquire key waterfowl habitat areas in Canada and Mexico, with the remainder to be spent on projects in the United States.

Numbers of many wild duck species have fallen to record lows during the 1980's as a result of drought and continuing destruction of wetland habitats needed for nesting, migration, and wintering. While fall flights of ducks in the early 1970's numbered near 100 million, this year's fall flight index estimate for ducks in surveyed areas was only 64 million, the second lowest since such projections began in 1969. The North American Plan's primary goal is to restore waterfowl fall flights to the 100 million level by the year 2000.